



Operating Assistance Woes

Operating assistance has always been an issue of utmost importance to transit providers across the country. Many rural transportation providers are primarily funded through a mix of FTA Section 5311 formula funding and the Medicaid non-emergency transportation program. The current state of affairs - economic downturn affecting state and local economies and funding streams, uncertainty regarding the future of health care in the US, and the current lack of a Federal funding bill, is causing the operating assistance woes to reach critical levels.

According to a survey conducted by the Amalgamated Transit Union's Legislative Department in April 2010, over 3,600 public transportation layoffs had taken place between 2009 and 2010 due to a lack of operating assistance. The survey also found that many more were likely.

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) has founded an Alliance for Transit Operating Assistance (ATOA) to address operating assistance issues. The main objective of the ATOA is to promote flexibility in use of federal funds. ATOA has a Charter that includes several resolutions:

- ✓ The Alliance for Transit Operating Assistance supports H.R. 2746 which would provide transit systems with local control of federal transit investment and allow them to preserve critical service and maintain affordable fares during

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tough economic times so that working people may be offered quality, affordable public transportation.

- ✓ The Alliance believes all community and public transportation systems should be able to decide locally when and how to best deploy federal and local investment for either operating or capital uses.
- ✓ The Alliance supports legislative action that deals with the current crisis in transit operating investment specifically, even if such action is time-limited, while maintaining its long-term goal of permanent empowerment of local transit system decision-making.
- ✓ The Alliance supports passage of H.R. 2746 and seeks similar legislation in the U.S. Senate.
- ✓ The Alliance seeks to include transit operating assistance in any future Economic Stimulus, Climate Change, or Surface Transportation Reauthorization Legislation.
- ✓ The Alliance favors, as is stipulated in H.R. 2746, the development of federal incentives to increase local and state transit investment.

To illustrate the ATOA's point, several examples of hard times in the transit industry are included on the website (provided at the end of this article).

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Notes from the Top

by Donna Lavigne

It's hard to believe that 2011 is here already. It seems like just yesterday we were all worried about bringing in the new millennium and now we are officially into the second decade. As usual, this is an extremely busy time of year here at the DOTD Public Transportation Section. We are currently reviewing the applications that everyone sent in on February 1. We should have all of the grant applications in the FTA system in the next month or so.

Several changes have happened here at DOTD. Mike Schiro, our former Assistant Secretary over the intermodal division retired in February and his replacement started Monday, March 28, 2011. Our new Assistant Secretary over the Intermodal Division is Dennis Decker. Mr. Decker comes to us from the Federal Highway Administration and was most recently the Division Administrator of the Ohio FHWA Office. He brings some great intermodal expertise to the job.


As some of you may already know, rural transit benefited greatly from the Stimulus money that came out of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Rural transit was able to pull down over \$15 million that was spread across the states to our various providers. Read more about the funds in the Spotlight Article later in the newsletter.

We are planning several great workshops for this year. There will be a Maintenance Workshop in April that will take place in Marksville. We are also planning a coordination workshop for July in Alexandria. This will be a wonderful chance for everyone to refresh and renew our commitment to developing truly coordinated human service transportation in the state. In addition, we are working on developing a cost allocation workshop tentatively scheduled for September.

For those of you who recall from last year's conference, we have set our sights on Lake Charles for the next Louisiana Public Transit Conference. We are

talking to the hotel now and should have some news about a date and place sometime in the next couple of months.

Just a gentle reminder for all of our providers, the end of the fiscal year is approaching, June 30, 2011. We will need everyone to get all remaining FY 2010/2011 invoices in to our office no later than July 15, 2011. We will, of course, be sending notices out closer to that date.

That's it for this time... and thanks for all that you do to increase the mobility of those people in need here in Louisiana. 



Announcements



**The CTAA EXPO is scheduled for
June 5-10 in Indianapolis, IN**

**For those wishing to attend, please contact DOTD PT at
(225) 274-4302 or PublicTransportation@la.gov**

Events Calendar

APTA Conferences

International Bus Rodeo
May 20-24, 2011 Memphis, TN

Bus & Paratransit Conference
May 22-25, 2011 Memphis, TN

Rail Conference
June 9-12, 2011 Boston, MA

Risk Management Seminar
June 19-22, 2011 Des Moines, IO

For more information: www.apta.com



Other Upcoming Conferences/Training:

Implementing Rural Transit Technology
April 26, 2011 Lincoln, NE

Transit ITS Regional Workshop
May 3-4, 2011 Reno, NV

National ADA Symposium
May 8-9, 2011 Las Vegas, NV

For more information: www.ctaa.org

TRB HCM2010 Webinar Series:
New Multi-Modal Urban Streets
Methodology—Pedestrian, Bicycle, and
Transit Methods
April 27, 2011 Webinar

For more information: www.trb.org

PASS Training

May 17-19, 2011 Baton Rouge, LA

For information: www.dotd.la.gov

NTI Courses:

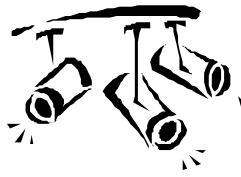
For information: www.ntionline.com

Transportation Safety Institute Classes

Courses are offered around the country
on various topics throughout the year.

For more information, please visit:
www.tsi.dot.gov

**Happy
Easter**



Spotlight on...



ARRA Dollars Fund Louisiana Transit Projects

Everyone, except those living in a cave for the past several years, has heard of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The bill, also commonly referred to as the Stimulus or The Recovery Act, is an economic stimulus package enacted by the 111th United States Congress in February 2009.

ARRA was intended to create jobs and promote investment and consumer spending during the recession. The Act included federal tax incentives, expansion of unemployment benefits and other social welfare provisions, and domestic spending in education, health care, and infrastructure, including the energy sector. The Act, signed into law on February 17, 2009, included a total investment of \$787 billion.

The Transportation Sector received a total of \$48.1 billion, some in the form of Transportation Income Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grants. The breakdown within the transportation sector was as follows:


\$27.5 billion for highways
\$8.4 billion for transit
\$8.0 billion for high speed rail
\$1.3 billion for Amtrak
\$1.5 billion for National Surface Transportation Discretionary Grants

Specifically, ARRA included \$6.9 billion for new equipment for public transportation projects and \$750 million for the maintenance of existing public transportation systems.

Here in Louisiana, DOTD Public Transit had a call for projects and the state received over \$15 million for public transit providers in the rural areas. The funds were used in a variety of ways, as shown below:

Preventative maintenance \$496,036
Vehicles \$4,614,148
Computers, portable generators, and pressure washers \$1,117,802
Security Cameras \$1,157,743
Bus Garage \$3,348,484
Large Generators \$442,127
Intercity Bus \$2,291,056
State Administration \$1,808,111

Total \$15,273,707

These funds have purchased 96 vehicles and cameras to monitor them. As noted above, the funds were also used to purchase other much needed equipment such as computers, portable generators (now a must have in Louisiana), some large stationary generators and some pressure washer equipment. The funds were allocated to agencies in 32 rural parishes. 



One of the DOTD PT Section's mandates is to provide information and technical assistance



to transit providers in Louisiana to assist them in meeting their requirements for FTA funding. These activities come in many different formats and venues. DOTD PT provides numerous training courses, workshops, and training material as well as a website and an annual conference. To keep all of our constituents up to date on DOTD PT's activities, DOTD On The Go features just a few selected items each quarter.

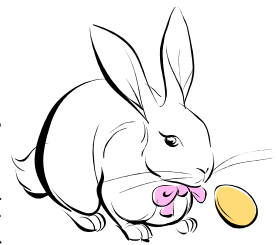
DOTD Conducts Site Visits

As noted in our last newsletter, part of the outreach and assistance that DOTD provides to the Rural Public Transportation (Section 5311) and Elderly and Disabled (Section 5310) providers, are site visits from the Program Managers. They have been out conducting numerous site visits during the first quarter of 2011. Rural Provider visits included Allen Parish, Vermillion Parish, Evangeline Parish, Jefferson Davis Parish, Cameron Parish, and Terrebonne Parish. E&D Provider visits included Lafourche COA, Lafourche ARC, the Special Education District #1, Calcasieu ARC, Mathew 2540, BIMS, and St. Charles COA.


HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY

DOTD Outreach to Under-served Parishes

Also as reported in our last newsletter, one of DOTD's primary goals is to provide some form of public transportation in all 64 parishes. It is a goal listed in the Louisiana Vision 2020 Plan. To further this goal, DOTD has been conducting educational visits to all of the parishes in Louisiana that do not currently have some form of public transportation services. During the first quarter of 2011, DOTD met with representatives from Natchitoches Parish, Concordia Parish, Sabine Parish, Catahoula Parish, LaSalle Parish, Grant Parish, Winn Parish, and Bossier Parish. They will continue conducting outreach throughout 2011.



In The Spotlight

If your agency or someone within your agency deserves recognition for a job well done, or has already received recognition or an award, please let us know. Email or send a brief description, photos, and contact information to Donna.Lavigne@la.gov or to Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development/Public Transit Section, attn: Donna Lavigne, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804. 

Contact Information Announcement

In our attempt to keep everyone informed of special events, workshops, conferences, and important information regarding public transportation in Louisiana, DOTD PT maintains a Contact Database. If information about your organization - new phone number, new director, new address or email - has changed, please help us keep our database current. Email your updated information to: publictransportation@la.gov

Thanks for your Help!

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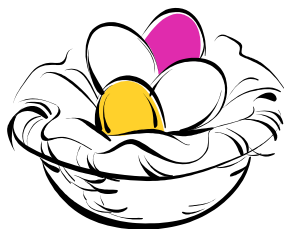
One such example is of a transit property in Ohio that purchased 13 buses for \$713,000 and then ran out of operating money and nearly shut down. A last minute intervention allowed the agency to continue operating, but at significantly lower service levels.

The economic strains felt in the transit industry have not gone unnoticed. In a March 2010 posting on US Transportation Secretary LaHood's blog, Fast Lane, he posted the following concerning the current operating assistance crisis: "Accordingly, I will work with members of the House and Senate this year to see if we can allow transit agencies more flexibility to use a portion of their federal funds to cover operating costs during these tough economic times." The secretary added, "...Now, this cannot be a blank check. There must be limits. And clearly, we're talking about temporary assistance, not the normal course of business. But for right now, we should do what we can to keep our trains and buses operating, to keep people working, and to keep people getting to the jobs they need so badly. We need to support this industry so it can help families meet their daily needs all across the country."

In addition to Secretary LaHood's interest, former Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, James Oberstar (D-MN) announced support last year for giving urban transit agencies more flexibility to spend federal transportation formula money on operating.

However, other members of congress are also pushing issues related to operating assistance. Last year, Senator Sherrod Brown announced his intention to introduce legislation focusing on complete flexibility on use of federal funds for all transit system running 100 or fewer buses in peak service.


In addition to providing flexibility over use of federal funds, other changes to federal rules would provide much needed relief to transit providers, especially in rural areas. Currently, any money collected at the fare box must be used to reduce the amount of operating assistance requested.



If a rule change were enacted that viewed those fare box funds as part of the local match, it would provide transit agencies the ability to link local service improvements with an increase in fares.

During development of the last federal transportation reauthorization - SAFETEA-LU - FTA Section 5311 local share flexibility was offered to state with large tracts of federal land. The next legislation needs to explore offering similar filters based on local unemployment and/or fuel prices as triggers for lowering local match ratios.

Regardless of where it comes from, transit agencies across the country and here in Louisiana need some relief from their operating assistance woes. Local economies are struggling and matching funds are scarce.

For more information on the ATOA search Google for "Alliance for Transit Operating Assistance." 



From Capitol Hill...

In early March of this year, the House passes H.R. 662, a measure to extend SAFETEA-LU through the end of the fiscal year by a vote of 421-4. The Senate took up and approved the bill, sending the seventh extension of the bill to the President's desk for signature. The measure authorizes funding for surface transportation programs, including transit, at the FY 2010 levels through September 30, 2011. Congress hopes that it can get a 6 year bill passed by that time. 